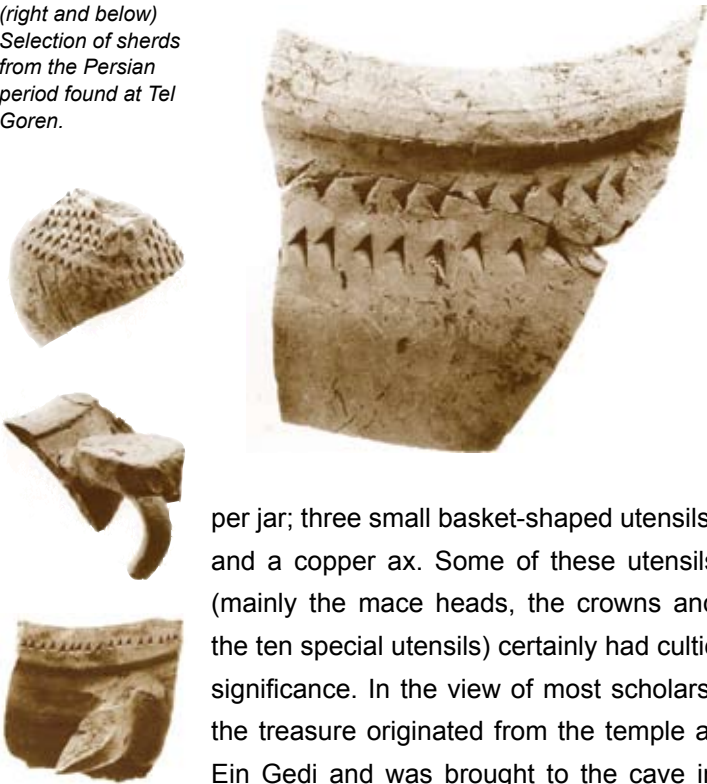


(right and below)
Selection of sherds
from the Persian
period found at Tel
Goren.



per jar; three small basket-shaped utensils; and a copper ax. Some of these utensils (mainly the mace heads, the crowns and the ten special utensils) certainly had cultic significance. In the view of most scholars, the treasure originated from the temple at Ein Gedi and was brought to the cave in Nahal Mishmar in time of danger, to protect the objects from plunder.

In 2003, excavations took place at a cave below the Ein Gedi spring (the Moringa Cave) in which 3,000 potsherds and more than 150 flint objects dating from the Chalcolithic period were found. These findings indicate that this cave was used as living quarters, meaning that a settlement probably existed at Ein Gedi as early as the Chalcolithic period. Hence, the temple should no longer be viewed as a distant pilgrimage site but as a cultic center that also served the local inhabitants.

2. The Biblical Period

As noted above, En-gedi is mentioned in the biblical story of Saul's pursuit of David:

Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines.... And David went up from thence, and dwelt in the strongholds at En-gedi. And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying: Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. . . .

(1 Samuel 23:28–24:3)

Two hymns in the Book of Psalms (57 and 63) state that they were composed by David when he went into hiding in the Judean Desert. Psalm 57, entitled: "To the choirmaster: *Al-tashheth* (according to Do Not Destroy); a *michtam* of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave" begins:

*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me,
For I seek refuge in You;
I seek refuge in the shadow of Your wings,
Until danger passes.*

By way of contrast, Psalm 63, whose title is "A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah," opens with the verse:



*Philistine noble,
as depicted on a
faience plaque
from the time of
Ramesses III,
Medinet Habu.*